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SCALE HOW "MEDITATIONS."

Dominus Illuminatio Mea.

No. 5.

(S. John i., 29-34.)

(v. 29.) How graphic the picture is. We see "the mild Son of Man" drawing near with that gracious dignity which we know must have been His; as He approaches, a word of amazing insight is given to the Baptist. The tender image of "the Lamb of God" is so dear and so familiar to us that we can hardly realize that it came to the Baptist as a sudden flash illuminating the whole history of the Jews since their deliverance from Egypt and opening up the meaning of every Paschal Feast,—and this, of a Man, standing in their midst! It must have been to the disciples of the Baptist a very shock of revelation:—"In this Man, of countenance so benign, of aspect so meek and lowly, behold the interpretation of all the sacrificial rites which have become to you a religion in themselves. Behold in this Man the great deliverance; it is He that taketh away the sin of the world!" How could they receive so great a gospel for which they were so little prepared? Can we receive it? Do we receive it when we are overwhelmed with the thought of our own unworthiness, of the unspeakable wickedness in the world? But John, for this moment at any rate, entered into the larger hope. Looking a fellow-Man in the face, unfettered by the limitations of sense and circumstance, he could say "which taketh away the sin"—not of the Jews, but—"the sin of the world." Only as we have this faith, have we faith enough to go on with; can we believe—of the sins which make us mourn, of the faults which vex us in those dear to us, of the depths of wickedness which are without us on every side,—that He taketh away all this sin; taketh with a constant, steady, unceasing action of taking until in the end He hath taken all away, and there shall be no more sin.

(v. 30.) Again, while all eyes are turned upon the approaching Presence, John takes occasion to repeat his saying about the precedence of Christ; no mere social precedence such as we yield to those above us in rank, but, as we have it in the marginal reading,

"first in regard of me," the greatest concern of all his concerns, the subject of his continual thoughts, the object of all his desires. Nor was the Baptist satisfied withal that he had attained; we read elsewhere this deep law of the Christian life as formulated by him—"He must increase, but I must decrease."

(v. 31.) "And I knew Him not." The two related families may not have met, or, in his kinsman, John may not have recognised the Christ. But the stir of His coming was in the air and we may believe that much of John's wilderness life was spent in meditation upon the character and work of the coming Messiah—the more intent and passionate because he knew that he himself was the forerunner, that, indeed, his baptism with water should be as it were a condition of the manifestation of Christ.

"For this cause:"—how well for John to know his life sanctified by a great purpose which was not of his choosing but was his vocation, calling. And how rich is our life, too, when we perceive that there is no calling among men too lowly to have for its purpose the manifestation of Christ. Pleasant ways and kindly words and simple duty-doing, in these things of every-day life Christ is manifested.

(v. 32.) "And John bare witness saying,"—this introduction seems to point to a testimony borne on still another occasion. There is no direct account given in the Gospel of S. John of Our Lord's baptism, only this indirect reference made by the Baptist. To him, as to each of us, the revelation of Christ came by the Holy Spirit; "he beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven and it abode upon Him." Most of us have observed how the every-day sights of the natural world have been hallowed, whether by association with our Lord, or, by His use of them to convey deeper truths. The lambs upon the hillside, the reeds in our lakes, the shepherd and his flock, the grass, the cornfield, the wind, the face of the sky, the sea and the fishing boats and the fisher folk, and many other sweet natural associations, are as bonds of sympathetic thought between us and our Lord. But perhaps we fail to realize that those things which He observes with His eyes and hallows by naming with His lips, are but types of the rest chosen to point to us the fact, that nature teems with teaching of the things of God, that every leaf on every tree is inscribed with the divine Name, that the myriad sounds of summer are articulate voices, that all nature is symbolic, or, as has been better said, is sacramental. Realizing the close correspondence and inter-dependence between things natural and things spiritual, that God nowhere leaves Himself without a witness, and that every beauteous form and sweet sound is charged with teaching for us, had we eyes to see and ears to hear, we shall better understand any single emblem brought be-

fore us than if we suppose it to be chosen arbitrarily and taken away from its connection with the natural world. The Church of Christ has always loved this emblem of a dove, this embodiment which the Holy Spirit assumed when He descended upon Christ and abode with Him. The dove, "sweet messenger of rest," moving upon the face of the waters, was a pledge of restoration; its return to the Ark typified the homing instinct of men; tenderness and peace, confidence and comfort, constancy and sweetness, abiding love, unfailing gentleness, quiet ways, these are among the notions which men by nature associate with the dove, and which through this image we learn to associate with the "gracious Spirit, heavenly Dove." It is worth while to consider the meanings that our great nature-poet finds in the dove—though they have no obvious reference to the event of the Baptism.

"I heard a Stock-dove sing or say
His homely tale, this very day; . . .
He sang of love, with quiet blending,
Slow to begin, and never ending;
Of serious faith, and inward glee;
That was the Song—the Song for me!"

It is solacing to the heart of Christendom to know that our blessed Lord was not without the comfort of this "mutual love," "serious faith," "inward glee," that the joy of the Lord was with Him even while He dwelt among us, a Man of sorrows. What a thought of joy at the baptismal font, of consolation throughout life amid the tossing of the waves of this troublesome world, is this of the Divine Spirit coming to us, also, in the likeness of a dove. It was by the dove which rested upon Him that John was taught to know his Lord; and, wherever Christ is, the Divine Spirit will brood in gentleness and tenderness, in quietness and confidence, and in unspeakable "inward glee;" for, "He baptiseth with the Holy Spirit."

(v. 34.) "He shall testify of Me" says our Lord of the Divine Spirit. So it was with John. With the coming of the Spirit he reached the summit of the mount of vision. He was at his greatest; for, according to our faith and insight, is our power for action and influence, "Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh":—the Baptist sees it all,—"this is the Son of God," of the essence of the Father, very God of very God. To know this of a Man standing in the midst of other men was indeed triumphant faith. As our Lord said after to S. Peter, when he too saw the veil lifted, "flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Only so can any of us know the Christ. "Lord increase our faith."

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SCALE HOW "MEDITATIONS."

Dominus Illuminatio Mea. *Epc*

No. 3.

February 13th, 1898.

S. John's Gospel: The Prologue, verses 12-18. *from the*

(v. 12.) To believe in His Name, —

"Is given to Faith, affectionate and free,
Not wrought by force of self-confounding thought."

(v. 13.) A man cannot work himself into belief from any motives of what has well been called "eternal selfishness"—"not for the sake of gaining Heaven nor of escaping Hell"—not by the will of the flesh is the faith born which recognizes the Word, neither by the will of man—no intellectual effort, no self-confounding thought, will discover the Word to us—but by the will of God we believe. Let us not suppose that God wills, chooses, that some of us should receive the power to become the sons of God and others should never have this power. Is it not rather that our will must embrace the will of God, must accept the ineffable mystery, adore the grace, be so united with the will of God that no perplexity baffles our understanding, because we do not seek to understand? Then Faith, affectionate and free, the vision of the Son of God, is possible, and, with the vision, comes the power to become more and more, eternally, the child of God. *repeated*

(v. 14.) "The Word became flesh." In these four words we have summed up the story before which myriads of Christian souls have bowed in tender reverence—the story of the Birth in Bethlehem. It would seem as if, in all ages and in all countries, there had been in human hearts a desire, so universal as to be prophetic of its own fulfilment,—the desire that "the gods" would "come down to us in the likeness of men." Our hearts are wiser than our heads; the intellect of man says, "this thing is impossible;" the heart insists that this is the only satisfaction for its wistful desires,

that there must be a Man, Who fulfils all that is possible to man, Who is God, and Who links us with God. "And dwelt among us," not visited us as the wind, we know not whence or whither, but went in and out among us with human ways like our ways and needs like our needs and tendernesses like our tendernesses, so that we could rivet our eyes upon Him and see and be satisfied. "And we beheld His glory," says S. John, not his, *line of beauty in middle page* "To overlook the glory close and near" he beheld with the fixed gaze of love and discipleship, and he knew that that which he beheld of lowly living and service and suffering was "glory." Perhaps this is one of the secrets of life—to know "glory" when we see it. Moses prayed, "I beseech Thee show me Thy glory," and the answer was, "I will make all My goodness pass before thee," and for three and thirty years all the goodness of God, which is His glory, passed up and down in the eyes of men. "I ever taught," He says, "where all the Jews come together." The luxury of seclusion was not for Him. A life never out of sight was a life always divine; but only the few disciples "beheld." The rest of the world judged Him according to its own measure and called Him names which it pains us to repeat. His "glory" is still in the world, not in the full measure in which S. John beheld it, but a little here and a little there wherever any humble soul seeks to walk in the light and to go about doing good. May we behold His "glory" wherever it is, and cast from our eyes all bandages of pride and prejudice which could blind us to a single ray of the light that comes from Him. *next line*

"Full of grace and truth"; here are the tests by which we shall know His glory wherever it shines. "Grace" is hard to define; "the touch of God" an old writer calls it, and perhaps we can go no further; but our every-day words "graceful" and "gracious" help us. The quite fit action or word is, we say, "graceful," and we can say no more. We mean that it is the very word which should have been spoken, said just at the right time, just in the right way, neither more nor less than was fitting, or the very act that should have been done. "Gracious" implies more; the word or the act is not only beautifully fit in itself, but is kind and cordial and fit towards us who receive it. It comes to us with a smiling benediction. The baby who stretches out a hand to one does the little act with a strange graciousness. Our gracious Queen is "gracious" when she sits beside the beds of her sick soldiers; the act is so fit and so perfect in itself and towards them. Now and then we may say graceful things, and do gracious things; but with what a sense of infinite goodness comes before us that Life which was full of grace, which never, no not for an instant, entertained an

ungracious thought. And these conceptions of "graceful" and "gracious" touch only the fringe of the garment of grace. It was well for S. John to behold this "glory." May our eyes also be unveiled!

"And truth." At the first glance we do not find ourselves quail before this standard of measurement as before the other. We may not be gracious or graceful, we say, but at any rate we are honest. Are we? What of the idle talk with which we entertain each other? Does nothing pass our lips but that which is our sincere, carefully thought-out, conviction? Do we never express regard or consideration or approval or disapproval but in the exact measure in which we feel it? We need not go on with such questions as these: we are convicted before the first, and feel that absolute truth is impossible to us. But this Man, Whose "glory" S. John beheld, walked about in the world with a lamp of truth, as it were, Whose ray flashed straight into the heart of every subject He spoke upon, every person He looked upon; and new things, strange things, an inverted order of things, came to light,—the last became first and the first became last. May He illuminate us with His truth that we may see His "glory" in the things which are least, and not be dazzled by the sham glory of the things which the world calls great. *4*

(v. 15.) We return to the witness of S. John Baptist. "He is become before me," the Baptist says, "for He was before me." Probably we have here the secret of all witness for Christ. It appears so simple that we are inclined to say, "Of course." "Of course" Christ was before the Baptist, and "of course" Christ is before us in the sense of the one with the greater claims. Surely of this there can be no question. Well for us if we can say this in spirit and in truth, for the essence of all idolatry lies in this—the preferring of "I myself" to any other—to the Christ of God. This besetment is so subtle that we can hardly be aware of it. It takes the guise of penitence, anxiety, humility, of the feelings we call our best and holiest. But self-occupation, whether in the form of self-depreciation or self-exaltation, is giving self that place of preference which is due to Another. It is less easy, than it seems, to arrive at the standpoint of the Baptist and to recognise that in all things Christ is before us, is of more consequence than we are, is to be considered and thought upon first in all our troubles and perplexities. This is not born of the flesh; it is of God. *(R.V.)*

(v. 16.) But the sense of spiritual effort need not depress us. The fulness which S. John beheld and proceeds to set before us, in the Gospel, is for us all: we all receive of it and "grace for grace." *4*

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"The phrase means a continual recurrence of kindnesses."* This is a phrase to be thankful for. We are all aware of the continual kindnesses of God. Every day brings some surprising delicacy of kindness that touches us, and yet we do not boldly say to ourselves—"This is a special kindness shown to me by God; this comes out of the fulness of the grace and graciousness of Jesus Christ." If He is so wonderfully kind in the small things of every-day life, He will not be less kind in the greater things. He Himself will enable us to put Him in that first place in our thoughts which belongs to Him and to leave off troubling about ourselves. This is due to us of His grace.

(v. 17.) "The law was given by Moses." I suppose most of us grow up under the discipline of the law. "I must try and leave some fault behind while I am young. I am trying very hard to do so, but I find it very difficult. I think of Life's Ladder; every fault I conquer I get one step higher, do I not?" I quote from the letter of a little girl. We all go through it. We all know what it is to toil up this ladder of perfection and, when we think we have gained a round or two, to find we have slipped back to the old place or lower; but, "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Grace, continual kindness, help, and comfort. Truth, revelation, insight, the power to see Him as He is and, in the strength of love, to rise into that holiness which is not individual perfection, though that also comes of it, but the power to put Him first. *merely*

(v. 18.) This is how we may know God and see Him Who is invisible. The Son hath declared Him, hath revealed to us a mystery, inconceivable to the heart of man, the Humility of our God.

It would seem to us almost a pity to touch upon in advance, and in a cursory way, many thoughts that are worked out in detail as the Gospel goes on, but this is S. John's method. He begins with a prologue which arrests our attention, stirs our heart, touches the deepest things of our life, puts us, in fact, into that attitude of mind which should enable us to perceive, as he goes on to unveil the Word, a little now and a little again as we are able to bear it.

Cp } * Rythmic translation of *The Imitation of Christ*.

SCALE HOW "MEDITATIONS."

Dominus Illuminatio Mea.

No. 4.

February 20th, 1898.

(S. John i., 18-29.)

THE WITNESS OF THE BAPTIST.

We read in the other Gospels of the religious revival which the preaching of the Baptist had brought about. It does not belong to the purpose of the writer of the Fourth Gospel to tell us of the multitudes who came to hear the Preacher in the wilderness; but it was evident to all men that an important religious movement was going on and the Church at Jerusalem could not ignore it. Besides, they also were looking for some great One and—might not this be He? He appeared amongst them at any rate with the credentials of a prophet which had ever been found in a message.

(v. 19.) This man had plainly a message, and his hermit life and his hermit dress, keeping up the traditions of the prophets, added a certain authority to his message; so the rulers of the Jews sent a deputation to ask the Baptist who he was. He might even be the Christ Himself, for, though prophecy is so luminous in the light of its fulfilment, the Jews do not appear to have looked for prophet, king, priest, and sacrificial victim, in One.

(v. 20.) John confessed and denied not. He said "I am not the Christ." We can conceive that even he might have been misled by his success as a preacher into an awed questioning with himself as to whether he were indeed the Coming One. But the preacher in the wilderness escaped this danger because his thoughts were not concerned with himself.

(v. 21.) His questioners seemed determined to find in him the fulfilment of prophecy, and they were right and John was wrong. "Art thou Elijah?"* they say, looking for the fulfilment of the

* Malachi iv., 5.

prediction in Malachi. And he said, "I am not." But our Lord says of him "And if ye will receive it, this is Elijah which was for to come." Teachers sent from God hardly recognise the significance of their work; much less that they themselves have been thought of from of old in the counsels of God. One more question—"Art thou the Prophet?"—the Prophet like unto himself, whose coming was foretold by Moses, who was to be, as he, a leader and commander of the people. "No," was the simple answer.

(v. 22.) The questioners are baffled and begin to be displeased. If the Baptist have indeed no divine sanction, what right has he to carry away people with his authoritative preaching? What account has he to give of himself?

(v. 23.) John replies by a figure, familiar to the prophets, taken from the progress of an Eastern Monarch. To this day it is the same. The King is preceded by his messengers who run before him hot-foot crying—"Make ready the way, make ready the way," and every labourer who hears is bound to leave his work in the fields and hasten to mend the ruts or even to lay miles of road, where none existed, that the King may have a smooth progress. The Baptist has declared his mission; he is not the Christ, but his coming is a certain proclamation of the near approach of Him who was the expectation of the Jews.

(v. 25.) They understand well enough this reference to the prophecy of Isaiah, but they are captious; they are not ready to receive that which they hear; and so they challenge John's right to baptise if he has no authority to make disciples.

(v. 26.) It might be that at that moment the eye of the speaker alighted upon Him Whom he had just proclaimed as King. "I baptise with water," he says, to repentance, that the people may be ready; but, in the midst of you, among you at this moment, all unaware to you while you question me, standeth that very One, the King, for Whom I am not worthy to do the office of the humblest slave. We long to know the rest, whether conviction came to this deputation of the Jews and what answer they took to those that sent them. But these are not important matters. Most important for us, parents and teachers, helpers and guides in any way to those about us, it is to study this example of a man sent from God to bear witness of the Light. To all of us who get a following of disciples, if it be only the little ones about our knee, are put these very questions to which the Baptist was able to give faithful answers. We, who teach and train, can hardly do better than to

S. Matthew xi., 14.

Duet xviii., 18.

Isaiah xl., 3.

take S. John the Baptist as our patron saint, and prepare ourselves, by his example, with unconscious answers to the questions which are unconsciously put to us. Whenever we allow our little following to suppose that our opinions are final, our authority absolute and self-sustained, our teaching right and other teaching wrong; whenever we try to hem them in by the narrow thoughts of the school, the sect, the family, are we not failing from the faithfulness of the Baptist? Are we indeed giving his simple and emphatic denial, "I am not the Christ?" Well for us if our Master should say to each of us, as to the Baptist, "Friend, go up higher," (This is Elijah which was for to come); and, when we say in our humility—"we are no heaven-sent teachers with a special message from God," He should say of us that we too are, in our small way, prophets and teachers sent forth by Him to bear witness of the Light.

Once more the Baptist sets us an ensample. He does not choose to be anybody; he empties himself, he has no personal claims, he is "a voice," a voice whose office it is to herald the approach, proclaim the nearness, of our King. In a sense each of us is a voice; we all seek expression; the more modes of expression we find, the fuller and richer is our life. Expression is to us, life; suppression, death. But not all voices utter the same name. Does a great artist paint a picture and, behind and through the marvellous technique, does his inspiring idea speak to our souls? If so, the artist utters another Name than his own. But are we content to admire the picture for itself and in itself? Does it fail to reach out of itself towards any of those thoughts by which men live, though it be in the broad sweep of a sky, the seal upon a countenance? In such a picture the artist utters a name, but it is his own. It is not only the great works of great people that express a name. We all remember the vivid scene in that carpenter's shop where Adam and Seth Bede each produces a door. Seth, though he had great spiritual searchings of heart, made a door which expressed his own name, a poor, incomplete, thing, the scoff of the workshop. Adam, though he would not have called himself religious, made a door fit and perfect; which expressed the highest Name. It is well to remember that, not only in our words but in our works and ways, we must needs express always a name, that name which is above everything to us, and which must needs be either our own poor name or the name of Him Who stands amongst us in our midst and Whose shoe's latchet we are not worthy to unloose.

In one more respect we, as teachers, shall do well to consider the example of the Baptist. He had only one concern,—to

prepare the way of the Lord,"—and we may lay it to heart that our teaching is effective only as it works towards this end. "There is only one thing worth living for—to be of use"—has been well said, and we may believe that every act of service, whether for the health, the virtue, or the happiness of the community, is a preparation of the way.

(v. 29.) How "deed enlarges scope." On the morrow, and again on the next morrow, come new opportunities for the Baptist to bear witness for Christ, and he seizes each opportunity. This witness of his is recognised by his Master. "Ye have sent out John, and he hath borne witness of the Truth," says our Lord;* and Christ is no man's debtor. He, in turn, bears witness of John: "Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater,"† He says, who knows all things from the beginning. So we find it to-day. Every poor little word of witness of ours is so abundantly magnified and made fruitful by the Word Himself that we are amazed. If our witness persistently fail, we had better examine ourselves. There is one common source of failure, what the prophet describes as "bowing down to our own nets." Perhaps this is the unsuspected defect in most of the teaching that fails in its witness.

* S. John v. 23. † S. Luke vii., 28.

S. John v. 33 (R.V.)